

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

2 October 1951

SUBJECT: SE-16: THE STRENGTH AND CAPABILITIES OF SOVIET
BLOC FORCES TO CONDUCT MILITARY OPERATIONS AGAINST
NATO (Draft for consideration by the IAC)

THE PROBLEM

To analyze the strength and capabilities of Soviet Bloc
forces to conduct military operations against NATO during the
period 1951-1954, including the capacity of the Soviet Bloc
to maintain and increase these forces after the outbreak of
war.

ANALYSIS

See the Enclosure.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The USSR has at present and will probably have through
mid-1954 military strength of such magnitude as to pose a con-
stant and serious threat to the security of the NATO powers,

DOCUMENT NO. 2
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☐
☐ DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO 10 (S) C
REVIEWED BY 1991
AUTH. 100-0-2
DATE: 23 Jan 81 REVIEWER: 0185571

SECRET

especially in view of the aggressive nature of Soviet objectives and policies.

2. Politically, economically, and militarily the Soviet bloc is capable of undertaking a major war. Its over-all strength and war potential should increase considerably by mid-1954.

- a. Despite continued political tensions within the Soviet Bloc, both the Soviet population and the European Satellites are under firm Kremlin control. In the event of war various internal political tensions might become more acute, but, short of armed invasion, they probably would not be a serious obstacle to Soviet ability to sustain a major war effort.
- b. The Soviet economy is already at a high state of war-readiness and its productive capacity is such as to enable the USSR to undertake a major war effort. In the event of war, the Soviet economy, unless crippled by a strategic air offensive, could support a substantial increase in war production.
- c. The over-all conventional military strength in being of the Soviet orbit is the greatest in the

SECRET

SECRET

world today. While the personnel strength of the Soviet bloc forces should increase only moderately through mid-1954, the completion of current programs should materially improve their mobilization potential and combat effectiveness. Soviet atomic capabilities, already substantial, should also materially increase.

3. In view of the high state of war-readiness of the Soviet economy and armed forces, the USSR is at present capable of initiating hostilities against the NATO powers with little or no warning. It now has the capability of simultaneously conducting a series of land campaigns against Western Europe and the Middle East, as well as air and submarine attacks against the UK, the US and Canada, and NATO sea communications. By mid-1954, growing Soviet military and economic strength, particularly in atomic weapons, should materially enhance Soviet ability to conduct these operations.

ENCLOSURE

I. SOVIET OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

1. The ultimate Soviet objective is to achieve a Communist world order dominated by the USSR. Soviet leaders have clearly shown that they consider themselves engaged in an unceasing and inescapable struggle with the non-Communist countries and that they regard this struggle as essentially a state of war in which any tactic or weapon that promises to weaken and destroy the enemy is admissible.

2. The principal immediate aim of Soviet policy in Europe is to obstruct the further growth of Western strength and unity. The Soviet Union is seeking specifically to divide the Western Powers, to frustrate their rearmament plans, to prevent a West German military contribution to Western defense, and to bring about the withdrawal of US forces from Europe.

3. In pursuit of these objectives it appears likely that the USSR will continue its present aggressive policy of political and psychological warfare. In fact, the USSR has already intensified its pressures in Europe, particularly in seeking to forestall West German rearmament and to undermine popular support of NATO defense programs. The continued growth of NATO

~~SECRET~~

strength, however, might lead the USSR to adopt a new approach:

- a. On the one hand, the USSR might seek to promote a temporary relaxation of international tensions. This approach would simply mark a tactical shift to a different method of political and psychological warfare, designed to bill the West into a false sense of security and undermine growing NATO strength.
- b. On the other hand, there will continue to be a serious possibility that the USSR in pursuit of its objectives might precipitate general war. In view of the aggressive nature of Soviet policy, the high state of Soviet war-preparedness, and the present Soviet superiority in conventional military strength, the danger of Soviet military aggression will remain particularly acute until the NATO powers achieve an adequate position of strength.

II. POLITICAL FACTORS

4. In contrast to the NATO coalition, the USSR occupies a uniquely advantageous position for conducting its foreign policy. The Kremlin (1) operates on the premise of a perma-

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

ment conflict with the non-Soviet world; (2) can act "correctly" on the governmental level while its world Communist network undertakes aggressive action; (3) can act quickly, secretly, and arbitrarily without reference to the opinions of legislatures, special interest groups, domestic public opinion, or its allies; (4) can use Communist ideology as an ostensibly moral cover for its own aggressive actions and as a magnet for attracting local and foreign support; (5) can conduct its propaganda with a single voice; and (6) can largely frustrate by its own security measures any countermoves directed at the Soviet people.

5. Despite the tensions peculiar to the USSR, as well as those inherent in any totalitarian state, the internal position of the Soviet Government is probably more secure at present than at any time since 1917. There are no indications of any actual or potential dissension within leading Soviet circles sufficient to weaken the Party's position, nor are there signs of either the intention or capability of the Soviet armed forces to challenge the Party's supremacy. Although living standards and police-state controls continue to produce dissatisfaction and lassitude on the part of large segments of the population, there is no evidence of any organized opposition groups capable of threatening the Politburo's control. While Stalin's death

~~SECRET~~

SECRET

might present serious difficulties, the present situation in the Politburo appears less conducive to a major split than at the time of the death of Lenin.

6. Despite continuing tensions within the Soviet bloc, Communist control seems assured in East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, Albania, Outer Mongolia, North Korea, and Communist China. The only appreciable likelihood of serious internal strains would be in Communist China, if it remains embroiled in hostilities in the Far East. While chronic difficulties will persist in the Sovietization of the European Satellites, they will probably be still held under firm Soviet control. Domestic dissatisfaction with the deprivations created by the forced pace of industrialization, agrarian collectivization, and rearmament will continue in the Soviet orbit, but will not constitute a serious threat to Soviet control.

7. As a result of its world network of Communist Parties and front organizations the USSR has the advantage of an organized center of opposition in most foreign countries. These groups provide local machinery for attracting non-Communist support, shaping public opinion, bringing pressure on local governments, and, by infiltration of strategic trade unions,

SECRET

disrupting the local economy. At present these groups are concentrating, together with the USSR, in a concerted drive to destroy the local will to fight by seeking to convince Western public opinion that support of Western defense plans will lead to severe economic hardships and eventually to war.

8. In the event of war, various of the internal strains within the USSR and its Satellites might become more acute, but, short of armed invasion, they probably would not constitute a serious obstacle to Soviet ability to sustain a major war effort. Within the USSR, the Kremlin's control apparatus would probably be sufficient to keep in check any antipathy toward the regime and the nationalist sentiment of various minority peoples. The European Satellite regimes would be subjected to increased strains, but it is believed that with the possible exception of Albania, no Satellite regime would be overthrown except by military conquest. Communist capabilities for espionage, sabotage, and subversion in Western Europe will vary in accordance with the success of local counter-measures.

III. ECONOMIC FACTORS

9. Strategic Significance of the Soviet Bloc Economy- Summary

a. The Soviet economy is already at a high state

~~SECRET~~

of war-readiness and it is estimated that its productive capacity is at such a level and of such a character as to enable the USSR to maintain a major war effort.* Continued large-scale arms production and stockpiling during the next two years will further increase Soviet economic war-readiness. There is evidence that during recent years high priority has been assigned to the development and production of new and improved military items. Moreover there has been increasing emphasis throughout the entire economy on strengthening military capabilities through technological advances and improved quality. Increased industrialization in the European Satellites and their further integration into the Soviet economy will also contribute to Soviet war potential.

- b. However, certain sectors of the Soviet economy are highly vulnerable to air attack and will probably remain so beyond 1954, despite Soviet efforts to improve their air defenses, to continue

*

This statement does not consider the effects of air attack. The vulnerability of the economy to such attack is considered in paragraph 21 below.

SECRET

dispersion of facilities and to develop a more complete system of reserve stocks.

- c. Some economic weaknesses will still persist within the Soviet bloc during 1952-1954, particularly in such items as certain types of aviation fuels, some chemical items, electronics, merchant shipping, some types of machinery equipment and precision instruments, certain nonferrous metals and ferro-alloys, natural rubber, transportation and a wide variety of replacement parts and equipment components. In a general war of long duration these deficiencies would become increasingly important, although they would probably not deter the Soviets from becoming involved in a general war.

*

10. Strategic Industrial Potential. Most of the heavy industries of the USSR are fairly well developed and are fully capable of supplying the requirements of the Soviet military machine. Estimated production of four basic industries for

*

The discussion in paragraphs 10 through 20 does not consider the effects of air attack unless it is specifically referred to.

SECRET

SECRET

1952 is shown below.

	USSR ^{3/}	Satellites ^{1/}
Steel (thousands of metric tons)	31,000 ^{2/}	7,700
Coal (thousands of metric tons)	265,000 ^{2/}	175,000 ^{2/}
Crude Oil (thousands of metric tons)	44,000 ^{3/}	9,100
Electric Powers (millions of kwh)	120,000	49,000

Industrial production is generally sufficient to support a major war effort, although in certain areas stringencies would doubtless develop. Of these, the two most important would probably be petroleum and electronics.

11. Petroleum. Petroleum production and stocks are generally adequate for a reasonable rate of peacetime development and for at least the initial Soviet military campaigns. The supply of high octane aviation gasoline might limit sustained large-scale strategic air operations in 1952; however,

-
- 1/ Eastern European Satellites, including the SovZone of Germany.
 - 2/ In hard coal equivalents.
 - 3/ The maximum probable figure.

SECRET

in 1953 and 1954 increased production facilities and the increased use of jet aircraft would reduce any such deficiency.

12. Electronics. It is estimated that the Soviet Bloc is capable of producing conventional electronics items, including communications and radar, in sufficient quantity to meet essential Soviet military needs. However, the capacity of this industry is probably not adequate to supply expendable military electronics items (proximity fuses, missile controls, etc.) on a scale which would permit widespread utilization in large quantities.

13. Other Industries. The Soviet Bloc has shown additional weaknesses in the production of certain special quality metal products, certain chemicals, special types of machinery and equipment, precision instruments and a wide variety of replacement parts and equipment components. Of considerable importance is the Soviet Bloc's very limited merchant ship-building capacity.

14. Production of Selected Military Items. The munitions industry, although concentrated in Western USSR and the Urals, consists of a large number of plants scattered throughout these regions.

- a. Aircraft -- Production of aircraft by the Soviet Union in 1950 is estimated at more than 7,000, of which approximately two-thirds were

~~SECRET~~

combat aircraft. Current indications are that 1951 production will be considerably higher than 1950 with increased concentration on combat types. Soviet production facilities have the capability of increasing this figure inasmuch as adequate supplies of materials, particularly aluminum, are available. The potential total capability to produce is estimated at 48,000 all types, which could be reached at the end of a twenty-four month period with existing plant facilities producing present models.

b. Motor Vehicles -- It is estimated that 400,000 vehicles (of which 360,000 were trucks) were produced by the USSR in 1950. By 1952 production will be at least 500,000. Satellites are expected to produce more than 50,000 motor vehicles in 1952.

c. Armored Combat Vehicles -- The estimated rate of production for 1950 of 6,000 tanks and self-propelled guns could, if desired, be increased within one year to rate of approximately 30,000. The peak Soviet production rate of armored fighting vehicles during World War II was 32,000

~~SECRET~~

per year. Of the Satellites, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and East Germany have at present the capacity to produce components and limited quantities of armored fighting vehicles.

- d. Shipbuilding -- The Soviet Union is not building appreciable numbers of ocean-going merchant ships of over 1,000GRT and it is estimated that its annual output of such vessels does not now exceed 25,000 GRT. The combined output of the Satellites is estimated at 40,000 to 50,000 GRT per year.

Except in the Far East, construction of naval vessels was held up by the war, and it was not until December 1949 or January 1950 that shipyard damage had been fully repaired and capacity production resumed. Yards are now becoming available for the construction of post-war ships. Capacity for building submarines has increased since the war and will continue to increase during the period 1952-1954.

15. Raw Materials. On the whole, the Soviet Bloc possesses adequate supplies of nearly all the natural resources required to develop an advanced industrial economy. Dependence

SECRET

on outside sources in relation to total consumption of most commodities is relatively small in peacetime. Deficiencies in some items such as copper, lead, zinc, tungsten, nickel, antimony, tin, cobalt, industrial diamonds, sulphur, pyrites, and natural rubber would force a careful allocation of these resources by the Soviets in wartime. In a long war of attrition and destruction these deficiencies might have an important affect on some lines of production. The position of the Soviet Bloc in raw materials is expected to improve, however, with the increased exploitation of raw material sources, such as tin, tungsten, and antimony in China, with continued imports and stock building of natural rubber, industrial diamonds, and other items which are obtained from Western sources.

16. Management and Labor. The labor supply for the industrialization of the Soviet Bloc will be increased by transfers from the preponderantly agricultural labor forces and by additional employment of women. Trained personnel, although growing in number, will continue to be short relative to industrial requirements. This will have its effects on the economy, but the government will give emphasis in placement and training to the more important and critical areas. Government control over the labor forces will be greater in 1952-1954. Efficiency of labor and management is expected to increase

SECRET

during 1952-1954 as a result of specialized training at various levels and experience acquired by postwar entrants into the labor force. On the whole, the capability of management and labor to support a Soviet Bloc military effort in the period 1952-1954 will be greater than it was in this area in 1939.

17. Agricultural Production. Although some difficulties appear to have developed in Soviet agriculture as a result of the program for the merger of collectives, these seem to have been overcome by the government's easing up in the prosecution of the program. The agricultural situation in the USSR is therefore expected to remain stable with production generally adequate to meet requirements either in war or peace, and with some improvement in the livestock and industrial crop situation. In the Satellites, recent tensions in the agricultural sphere will probably continue, but unless exacerbated by a rapid increase in the rate of collectivization they should not present an insuperable problem to the regime. For the Soviet Bloc as a whole, if harvests are normal production should be sufficient to meet present rates of rationed consumption, including continued stockpiling.

18. Telecommunications. The communications network of the Soviet Bloc is capable of meeting at least the basic minimum wartime requirements. Land line systems serving most

SECRET

of the Urals, European USSR and the European Satellites are supplemented by radio services of reasonable efficiency. The areas east of the Urals are generally dependent on radio communications. The military requirements of modern war would probably demand a more extensive utilization of radio communication throughout the whole country. The strain which might be imposed on Soviet radio transmission under such conditions might well be great; however, the system is probably designed, at least in large part, to meet such an emergency and cannot be expected to break down.

19. Transportation. Although inferior by US standards, the Soviet Bloc transportation system, in which railways occupy by far the most important position, probably has the capacity, after cutbacks in non-essential traffic, to meet military and civilian requirements in a major war. The greatest transport potential lies in the combined capacity of the East-West lines in Europe. One of the most vulnerable points in the Soviet economic and logistical position lies in the dependence on the Trans-Siberian railroad for support of the Far Eastern provinces; however, this weakness has been partially offset by stockpiling.

The difference in gauge between the Soviet and Satellite rail systems necessitates the transloading of all freight to standard gauge at or near the borders of the Soviet

SECRET

~~TOP SECRET~~

Union. Some 16 transfer points, several of which are extensive in nature, retard through freight movements, but their capacity is adequate to handle Soviet logistic requirements. Despite the foregoing limitations, the Soviet rail system is probably better equipped to support a major war effort than it was in 1940.

20. Ability to Increase Production in the Event of War.

If war were to break out in the period 1952-1954 the economy, in the absence of destruction from military action, could support an increase in military production. Reserve capacity in the munitions industry could be utilized and plants such as those currently producing tractors could be converted to military production. Materials, transportation, and labor would be carefully allocated to the highest priority producer and in the early phases of the war would not create critical deficiencies. In a war lasting more than two years certain items in tight supply would probably begin to weaken or limit certain phases of the military effort.

21. Vulnerability to Air Attack. The close balance between availability and requirements in many items of importance to the Soviet Bloc economy, together with the vulnerability of many segments of the economy to air attack, would represent the principal weakness in any effort to

~~TOP SECRET~~

SECRET

strengthen the economy of the Soviet Bloc under wartime conditions. The concentrations of plants in areas accessible to Allied bombers and the extreme difficulty of replacing or reconstructing such plants makes certain industries highly vulnerable to air attacks. Such attacks could produce a serious reduction in the supply of vital services and commodities; however, substantial stocks of these commodities and of military end items, which are widely dispersed, might prevent the full effects of such losses from being felt at the front during the early phases of the conflict. *

22. Vulnerability of the Economy to Economic Warfare.

Under wartime conditions the Western program of economic warfare would be much more effective than it is now. Not only would there be a much tighter and more complete system of export control but additional measures would be employed including: preclusive buying, black listing, foreign funds control, denial of shipping facilities and sabotage. The Soviet Bloc would attempt to reduce the effects of such a program by adjustments within the economy but there would be a definite limit on their ability to reduce these effects; and in a long war, with the inevitable attrition and destruction, some lines of military production would be seriously affected.

* The question of the ability of the Soviet Bloc to benefit from the economies of any areas it might overrun is not considered in this paper.

SECRET

~~SECRET~~

IV. PRESENT AND PROJECTED MILITARY STRENGTH

23. It is estimated that the present Soviet Bloc (less North Korea) armed forces have a total strength of approximately 6,200,000. Assuming that no war occurs, the 1954 total strength of the armed forces of the Soviet Bloc is estimated at about seven and one-half million.

24. For some time the USSR has been systematically strengthening its own and Satellite forces in Eastern Europe to maintain its relative advantage over growing Western strength. The highly mechanized Soviet group of armies in Eastern Germany is being maintained in an advanced state of combat-readiness and is being supplied with the most modern equipment. Soviet and some Satellite air units are being rapidly re-equipped with jet aircraft and an airfield expansion program is well under way.

25. Ground Forces. The present ground forces of the Soviet Bloc (less North Korea) have an estimated total personnel strength of 5,430,000, organized to include 175 Soviet, 65 European Satellite, and 219 Chinese Communist line divisions. Assuming that no war occurs, it is estimated that the strength and number of Soviet divisions will remain at approximately the present level through 1954, but that the armament, mobility,

~~SECRET~~

and capability of these forces for sustained combat will have improved. A significant increase in capabilities of the European Satellite forces has occurred since 1950 and by 1955 the present 65 divisions will have increased to 117. In addition to this numerical growth, it is estimated that the capabilities of the European Satellites will have increased to a point where they would possess significant offensive capabilities, without support of Soviet tactical forces, although sustained combat would require major Soviet logistical support.

26. Naval Forces. The Soviet Navy comprises 600,000 personnel and approximately 150 sea-going combatant surface units and 360 submarines. It is estimated that by 1954 the Soviet Navy will have increased to approximately 215 sea-going combatant surface units and about 645 operational submarines. The Naval forces of the Soviet European Satellites have not been considered in this report since they are small and made up of minor combatant types and miscellaneous lesser craft, suitable for local defensive operations only. No significant change is expected in this regard by 1954.

27. Air Forces. The Soviet Air Forces, including Naval Air, comprise an estimated T/O and E strength of 20,000 aircraft. Together with European Satellite Air Forces, estimated

at 1,850 assigned and potentially operational aircraft, and the Chinese Communist Air Force, estimated at 1,260 aircraft, the Soviet Air Bloc offers a combined estimated strength of 23,110 aircraft. It is estimated that by 1954 the personnel strength of the Soviet Air Forces will have been increased from a present 600,000 to 800,000. While the number of aircraft in units is not expected to be increased, it is expected that virtually all the fighter strength and a considerable proportion of the light and medium bombers will be jet-engined types and that combat efficiency will be significantly increased. Increases in the effectiveness of the Satellite Air Forces is expected with the introduction of jet-powered aircraft.

28. Status of Supply. It is estimated that the Soviet Army at present has sufficient stockpiled weapons, ammunition, supplies and equipment for a force of 175 divisions in combat in Europe and Asia for one year, independently of current production. There are adequate supplies of oil, food, etc., to service the Soviet Baltic, Northern and Black Sea fleets. The aircraft industry and associated industries are providing the Soviet Air Forces with a steady supply of new and modern aircraft and equipment. This supply will probably be large enough to allow the maintenance of a large war

reserve. By 1954 the over-all status of supply of the Soviet armed forces will have improved.

V. MOBILIZATION POTENTIAL

29. The armed forces of the Soviet Union include a total of 3,700,000 men with 6,750,000 additional trained reserves. There are an additional 17,250,000 reserves who have received some military training. The major problem of mobilization will be the allocation of technicians and individuals with mechanical skills among the three military services and the war economy. The armed forces of the European Satellites include a total of about 1,200,000 men with over 5,000,000 additional reserves of varying degrees of training.

30. Ground Forces. It is estimated that the Soviet Army is capable of expanding to a personnel strength of 8,000,000 organized into 320 line divisions by M / 30 days or shortly thereafter. While the European Satellites could mobilize a substantial portion of the 5,000,000 man reserve, their ability to equip ground force units will be the limiting factor. The availability of equipment from either Soviet or indigenous sources cannot be estimated at this time.

31. Naval Forces. Assuming that the personnel strength of the Soviet Navy at the beginning of mobilization remains substantially the same as at the present, it is estimated that

that the Soviet Navy can mobilize by M + 30 days to a strength of 800,000 men. Since the Soviet Navy does not maintain a major reserve fleet, but maintains its fleets in operational readiness, the mobilization of the Navy would not be a major problem.

32. Air Forces. It is estimated that the personnel strength of Soviet Air Forces, presently 600,000, will have increased to approximately 800,000 by mid-1954. It is believed that the Soviets could mobilize a total strength of 1,200,000 in all components of military aviation, including naval, shortly after M-day. It is estimated that presently 47,500 men are assigned to the European Satellite Air forces. Their mobilization potential depends in considerable measure on the degree of dependability of the reserve personnel, and it is not possible to determine what number might be considered reliable by the Soviets.

VI. MILITARY CAPABILITIES IN THE EVENT OF WAR

33. The Soviet Bloc forces, possessing the advantage of a concentration of force on interior lines and potentially exercising the initiative, are so disposed, organized, and equipped that they possess the capability of initiating hostilities with little or no prior warning. It is estimated that the Soviet Union has sufficient armed forces to undertake all

of the operations listed below and still retain an adequate reserve.

a. Simultaneously:

- (1) A campaign against Western Europe including Italy, with 75-90 line divisions and up to 6,000 tactical aircraft.
- (2) An aerial bombardment against the British Isles, with initially up to 350 medium bombers, 500 light bombers and 500 fighters.
- (3) Campaign in the Balkans to include European Turkey, with 55-60 line divisions and up to 2,000 tactical aircraft.
- (4) Campaigns against the Near and Middle East with about 25 line divisions and 500 tactical aircraft.
- (5) Campaigns in the Far East, employing up to 25 line divisions and 2,250 tactical aircraft against Japan and Korea.
- (6) Attacks against Canada and the United States, including Alaska and the Aleutians. Attacks could include mining, amphibious and airborne operations within range limitations, and aerial attack (conventional and atomic) against Canada and most of the United States.

- (7) A sea and air offensive against Allied sea communications, employing submarine and mining attack.
- (8) Subversive activities and sabotage against Allied interest in all parts of the world.
- (9) Defense of the Soviet Union against hostile attack.

- b. After the occupation of the Channel Port Areas, a full-scale sea and air offensive against the British Isles including an attempted invasion.
- c. Campaigns against Scandinavia and the Iberian Peninsula, as well as air attacks against Pakistan, as necessary.

VII. ATOMIC WEAPONS

34. Although the Soviet atomic stockpile will continue to increase through 1954, the disparity in numbers between current US and Soviet atomic bomb stocks will not be reduced.

35. The Soviet Union has and will have sufficient aircraft, trained crews, and bases of operation to warrant an attempt to deliver in the United States and in the United Kingdom, the full stock pile of atomic bombs that are now and will become available. The Soviet Union has the capability for

clandestine atomic explosions in ports and in selected inland areas, and may be able to launch guided missiles with atomic warheads from submarines within the period under consideration.